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**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**Report No.3 of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion  
Management of ACT School Infrastructure**

**Government Response**

**Presented by  
Yvette Berry MLA  
Minister for Education and Youth Affairs  
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## Introduction

The ACT Government welcomes the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion (the Committee) *Report 3 into the Management of ACT School Infrastructure*, released on 5 May 2022.

The ACT Government continues to be committed to an inclusive, equitable and high-quality education system that recognises the right of every child and young person to learn and benefit from the opportunities that education brings. That commitment is articulated in the *Future of Education Strategy*, the ACT Government's plan for education in the ACT over the next decade.

The report highlights the importance of school infrastructure in the delivery of teaching and learning in the ACT; as well as the importance of ensuring that every ACT public school student has access to high quality schooling and school infrastructure, to the broader ACT community.

Investing in safe and fit-for-purpose educational infrastructure is integral to ensuring ACT public school students continue to have access to facilities that encourage learning and belonging within inclusive school environments. Meeting the infrastructure needs of the ACT's public education system continues to require comprehensive planning to ensure that schools are conveniently located, are well-designed, and are ready to meet the enrolment demands of the surrounding area.

The Education Directorate is responsible for a large and diverse asset portfolio, with 90 schools located across more than 100 sites, catering for more than 50,000 students every year. As education practice improves in ACT public schools, infrastructure needs are continuing to be met to ensure that ACT public schools remain safe and fit for the purpose of enabling children and young people to gain a contemporary and high-quality education at any one of the ACT's 90 public schools.

As part of the *Inquiry into the Management of ACT School Infrastructure*, the Standing Committee received 24 written submissions, spoke with 26 witnesses over eight public hearings, and conducted site tours at ten ACT schools. The Government would like to thank the Standing Committee and everyone who took the time to participate and contribute to the Inquiry. The Committee made 35 recommendations in their report.

In our response, the Government has:

- **agreed** to 22 recommendations;
- **agreed in principle** to 8 recommendations; and,
- **noted** 5 recommendations.

The Inquiry has provided a valued opportunity to hear the broader community's view on school infrastructure. The Government recognises that key themes have emerged from the Committee report and recommendations, and from community submissions. We have considered these themes in our responses to the recommendations. Themes raised during the Inquiry included the following:

- School facilities maintenance and upgrades
- Community use
- Sustainability, heating and cooling
- Hazardous materials management
- School expansions

# Government Responses to Standing Committee's Recommendations

## **Recommendation 1**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government more carefully plans the construction of new schools to better meet size demands to avoid further construction in the early life of the school.*

## **Government Response**

Agreed

Population projections and enrolment forecasting are an important input into ACT Government investment decision making and planning for future public education infrastructure needs.

In 2022, the Education Directorate commenced using the new School Transition Estimation and Projection (STEP) model, developed in collaboration with the Australian National University (ANU) School of Demography. It is a multistate cohort projection model that incorporates population changes, births, residential development, migration, current school cohorts across various academic levels, historical behaviour, locational and household preferences to project future school demand across the ACT.

The model can generate more accurate projections (than previous projection models), which will better enable the ACT Government to anticipate future population and public enrolment growth and correspondingly to plan for infrastructure needs in a timely way.

The Government will continue to refine, develop, and improve enrolment forecasting in collaboration with the ANU. The Government also notes that demand projections rely on population growth forecasts and estimates of planned residential developments as key inputs, which are inherently subject to fluctuations. Actual population growth and residential development in an area may differ from these forecasts and estimates.

## **Recommendation 2**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that schools always maintain the capacity to accept the transfer of students from outside Priority Enrolment Areas who possess suitable reasons for requesting a transfer.*

Agreed in Principle

The ACT Government is committed to meeting the needs of all students in ACT public schools and continuing to guarantee enrolment for students to their local school, to fulfil its obligations under the Education Act 2004.

The Education Directorate's enrolment policy settings enable enrolment from students outside of their Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) under specific, standard enrolment criteria and circumstances (such as legal considerations or individual circumstances based on student wellbeing), in balance with ensuring available capacity for local in-area demand.

## **Recommendation 3**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government expedite the feasibility study for further college capacity in north Canberra and, if required, construction of further college facilities in Canberra's north.*

Agreed

The ACT Government is working towards delivering new college capacity in Canberra's north.

This work has been informed by feasibility and planning through the 2021-22 New and Expanded Schools ACT Budget funding commitments, and a further \$1 million to undertake master planning and preliminary design works for a second college in Gungahlin, through the 2022-23 ACT Budget.

A Priority Enrolment Area Shared Zone was established in 2022 to provide flexibility to students from nearby Gungahlin suburbs who may wish to enrol at Dickson College. This Shared Zone increases the choice and college capacity available for college age students living in Canberra's north.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government build a flexible offsite learning centre on Canberra's northside.*

Agreed

Flexible Education encompasses a diverse range of learning offerings that meet the needs of students in ACT public schools with complex or challenging circumstances that impact on their learning.

The Muliyan program supports students from all over Canberra with a multidisciplinary team of educators, allied health professionals and specialists. While engaging in learning through Muliyan, students remain enrolled in their school. The current site supports up to 30 students.

The ACT Government is committed to supporting students to access a range of flexible learning options and recognises the need for an additional flexible offsite learning centre in Canberra's north, which would be subject to future decisions of Government.

#### **Recommendation 5**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government articulates and communicates to the wider community medium and long-term plans to address capacity issues at schools.*

Agreed

The *ACT Infrastructure Plan 2019* is a comprehensive multi-decade plan detailing priority infrastructure investment, including proposals for new and expanded schools.

The Education Directorate also provides regular updates on medium and long-term infrastructure, investment, and demand management plans through the Education Directorate website, informed by ongoing work to consider medium- and long-term future capacity needs at ACT public schools.

The Education Directorate will also continue to engage with community stakeholders including Parent & Citizen Committees, School Boards and other community members and groups regarding schools planning.

#### **Recommendation 6**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government removes all library and specialist teaching facilities from school capacity calculations.*

Noted

The Education Directorate has commenced a review of the capacity assessment methodology. Libraries are not included in capacity calculations in any schooling sector.

#### **Recommendation 7**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that the adequacy of library and specialist teaching spaces are taken into account when the capacity of a given school is increased.*

Agreed

Library and specialist teaching spaces are considered on a school-by-school basis in the context of each school's unique and pedagogical needs.

#### **Recommendation 8**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provides more outdoor learning spaces.*

Agreed

The ACT Government is already taking action to increase the number of outdoor learning spaces in ACT public schools with annual funding dedicated to the expansion of outdoor learning spaces, including \$3.6 million in 2021-22.

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Education Directorate prioritised the installation of 23 new shade structures as part of a \$3 million budget allocation to provide external learning areas. All projects are scheduled for completion by October 2022.

#### **Recommendation 9**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provides more Technology classrooms.*

Agreed

The adequacy of technology classrooms is considered on a school-by-school basis in the context of each school's unique and pedagogical needs.

The Education Directorate Infrastructure Specification (EDIS) document identifies the need for dedicated Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) spaces as part of new school construction.

#### **Recommendation 10**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government factors in the provision of Out of Hours School Care into capacity planning at the school and Education Directorate level.*

Agreed

The ACT Government notes that schools planning already considers the provision of Out of School Hours Care (OSCH) in established and new schools.

#### **Recommendation 11**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures the use of environmentally sustainable materials in the construction and upgrade of schools.*

Agreed

The Education Directorate will continue to mandate the use of environmentally sustainable materials in the construction of schools.

One of the overarching principles within the Education Directorate Infrastructure Specifications (EDIS) document is that of 'Sustainable Design'. The commitment to the principle of 'Sustainable Design' requires the design to consider, and to incorporate the necessary elements to create sustainable education environments.

These elements include architecture, landscape, transport, linkages to broader networks and infrastructure that are low carbon, water sensitive and resource efficient in both construction and operation.

#### **Recommendation 12**

*The Committee recommends that the Education Directorate immediately focus on upgrading and maintaining tools, hardware, software, and firmware, as well as internal policies and procedures, to enable optimal digital literacy learning for ACT students.*

Agreed

The ACT Government is committed to providing students with the Information Communication Technology (ICT) that is fit for learners of today and to improving the digital literacy of ACT students.

This commitment is outlined in the *Future of Education Strategy*, where one of the foundations for the *Future of Education* is 'Systems Supporting Learning', and the use of data and information technology.

- since rolling out Chromebooks to all ACT secondary public school students in 2018, the Directorate continues to undertake an ongoing refresh of Chromebooks every three years. Over 3,300 devices were refreshed for secondary students in 2022;
- the ACT public primary schools one Chromebook to three student shared program will have over 2,100 Chromebooks refreshed in 2022;
- all ACT public schools benefit from one of the highest speed education networks in Australia called 'SchoolsNET' that provides connection to secure gigabit fibre broadband;
- access to wireless networks are available in all ACT schools and monitored, managed and maintained by Digital, Data and Technology Solutions (CMTEDD); and
- students are also able to use their own personal device if they choose, so their access to learning is personalised.

### **Recommendation 13**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government improve identification and education regarding the use of infrastructure for restrictive practices.*

Noted

The use of restrictive practice in ACT public schools is regulated under the *Senior Practitioner Act 2018* (the Act).

The Education Directorate and the Office of the Senior Practitioner continuously work together to develop and implement practice guides for the use of restrictive practice in ACT public schools including infrastructure considerations.

A suite of resources has been developed within the Directorate to support the implementation of the Act and is available to Directorate staff.

The Directorate works closely with the Australian Education Union, Catholic Education Office, and Association of Independent Schools to consider the legislative, strategic, and operational impacts of restrictive practice.

### **Recommendation 14**

*The Committee recommends that the Education Directorate engage with the Australian Electoral Commission to firstly understand their accessibility requirements for polling places, and then identify how the Directorate might address any barriers, to assist not only polling day, but even more importantly, everyday access for its own students.*

Agreed in principle

The ACT Government is continually upgrading and improving access to all schools across the city through an annual budget allocation.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) engages with the Education Directorate in the months prior to election dates being set. The AEC selects school sites based on electoral requirements and assesses the suitability and accessibility against its criteria. Following this assessment, the AEC identifies its preferred sites for polling day use.

A hire agreement is established with the AEC setting out which school sites have been identified and confirming arrangements for hire of these sites, including bump in and bump out.

The ACT Government notes that the process was successfully implemented for the 2022 Federal Election where 69 public schools were used as polling places.

The Education Directorate notes that the accessibility requirements identified by the AEC do not always align with the priorities of improving accessibility requirements for a functioning school used by a smaller demographic.

### **Recommendation 15**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government adopt a definition of 'inclusion' consistent with Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and General Comment No. 4 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the provision of public education in the ACT.*

Agreed in principle

The ACT Government has made reference to the United Nations definition of 'Inclusion' consistent with Article 24 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD), as part of a recent community consultation.

The consultation is part of a review of disability education and explored a range of perspectives on how to deliver the best possible learning opportunities for children and young people with disability in public schools.

The consultation heard views and experiences of people with disability, including current and former students, families, caregivers, and advocates. An Inclusive Education Strategy informed by this community consultation and other research evidence is currently being developed in collaboration with stakeholders.

The UN definition will be a seminal reference point used to settle the definition of 'Inclusion' for the Education Directorate that will underpin the Strategy.

### **Recommendation 16**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that all ACT school infrastructure adheres to Universal Design principles to ensure accessibility for students, teachers, parents, students who are carers, and carers with disabilities.*

Agreed in Principle

The ACT Government has committed to Universal Design principles through the Education Directorate's Infrastructure Specification (EDIS) document.

The document identifies one of the key overarching principles in designing school infrastructure as Universal Design. The need to incorporate Universal Design is necessary to reflect the Directorate's commitment to the principles of "equity, universality and non-discrimination".

The EDIS describes Universal Design as "the design of products and environments (both indoor and outdoor) to be usable by all people, without the need for adaptation or specialised design".

The EDIS is the briefing document for design consultants and construction contractors during the development of ACT Government public school infrastructure projects.

### **Recommendation 17**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government commit to ensuring that all ACT public schools are universally accessible as soon as possible.*

Agreed

The ACT Government is demonstrating the commitment to improving accessibility in public schools. This includes a specific allocation of \$4 million investment in 2021-22, in addition to the inclusion of accessibility works in many individual projects.

The ACT Government has also committed to Universal Design principles as part of all new school infrastructure, identified in the Education Directorate Infrastructure Specification (EDIS) document.

The Directorate notes that existing schools have challenges in meeting universal design due to legacy construction methods, building formation and site selection. Some of these challenges cannot be addressed until the appropriate time to reconstruct these sites.



### **Recommendation 18**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government articulates a clear and equitable process to prioritise accessibility and maintenance modifications to school infrastructure and facilities, as well as prioritise maintenance of accessibility facilities including ramps, toilets, and lifts.*

Agreed

The Education Directorate will further clarify processes to identify and prioritise accessibility and maintenance works and modification.

### **Recommendation 19**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government report on the tree canopy at ACT Government schools and detail plans for its expansion.*

Agreed

The ACT Government and the Education Directorate are seeking to improve access to geospatial information to assist in identifying tree canopy coverage across the ACT.

Further reporting requirements and delivery options will be considered.

### **Recommendation 20**

*The Committee recommends that all ACT Schools prioritise the incorporation of green space and sensory spaces into design to support the mental and emotional health of all students and especially students with disabilities and mental ill health.*

Agreed in Principle

The Education Directorate recognises the importance of appropriate outdoor and sensory spaces for students. The amount of available green space varies across different school sites due to the amount of available land and other urban developments.

The Education Directorate Infrastructure Specification (EDIS) states that there must be an integrated approach to the design of external environments that will help define the character of the school, enhance learning and teaching, and provide a sense of connection to the school. This standard is also applied to the expansion and major refurbishment of existing schools.

### **Recommendation 21**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide adequate space for community organisations to do in-reach support and provide adequate guidance for its use.*

Agreed

Schools choose which external programs and supports will address the needs of their students and their families. Schools consider these needs when designating existing spaces for school activities and supports, for example placement of student wellbeing support team facilities and offices for school psychologists.

Guidance on safe and supportive environments and design of new or refurbishment of existing schools is available through the universal design principles, subject to available space and budget allocation. The *Community Use of School Facilities Policy* and Internal Procedures provide information to schools and the community.

### **Recommendation 22**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prioritise infrastructure upgrades that enable increased community use of school facilities like remote locking.*

Noted

The Education Directorate notes this may include the ability to use technology, such as remote locking, to further enable community use of school sites, which would be considered alongside other priorities and subject to future decisions of Government.

**Recommendation 23**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government implements the Recommendations of ACT Auditor-General Report No. 11 of 2019—Maintenance of ACT Government School Infrastructure.*

Agreed

The ACT Government is continuing to progress the response to the ACT Auditor-General Report No. 11 of 2019—Maintenance of ACT Government School Infrastructure.

Updates on the status of the Education Directorate response to this report are available through the 2020-21 Education Directorate Annual Report.

**Recommendation 24**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that operational asset plans and annual maintenance plans are adequately funded by the Directorate, to remove the current need for schools to use money from other areas of their budget for maintenance.*

Agreed

The ACT Government has committed to the delivery of school based Operational Asset Management Plans (OAMPs) as part of the response the ACT Auditor-General report No. 11 of 2019—Maintenance of ACT Government School Infrastructure.

The development of OAMPs was identified in the ACT Auditor-General report No. 11 of 2019—Maintenance of ACT Government School Infrastructure.

**Recommendation 25**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide capital funding for school kitchen facilities for on-site food preparation to facilitate the ACT Government's free school breakfasts and lunches program.*

Noted

The ACT Government's meals in schools' initiative funds a trial of meal provision in five ACT public schools with breakfast and lunch available to all students three days per week. Evaluation of the trial will involve consideration of school infrastructure.

**Recommendation 26**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure appropriate, comfortable, and secure amenities in ACT public school staff rooms.*

Agreed

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that appropriate, comfortable, and secure amenities are provided to public school staff at all ACT public schools.

The Education Directorate upgrades staff rooms each year as part of the Capital Upgrades program.

**Recommendation 27**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that decisions on current and future school infrastructure needs are informed by a collaborative community engagement process that includes advice from relevant professionals.*

Agreed

The ACT Government, through the Education Directorate, will continue to engage with the community on current and future school planning and infrastructure needs. This will include direct consultation with stakeholders and seeking feedback from school communities.

The Government also complies with statutory planning requirements for public community consultation.

### **Recommendation 28**

*The Committee recommends that as part of the collaborative community engagement process the ACT Government outlines an overall vision for schools which includes short, medium, and long-term infrastructure plans and forecasted costs for budgeting.*

Agreed in Principle

The ACT Government has outlined commitments to future public school planning and investment through the *ACT Infrastructure Plan 2019*.

The Education Directorate also provides regular updates on medium and long-term infrastructure and demand management plans through the Education website.

Future updates to the ACT Infrastructure Plan will include planned and anticipated investment in public education infrastructure.

### **Recommendation 29**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that all indoor spaces in ACT public schools are climate controlled by the end of 2024.*

Agreed in principle

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that the appropriate level of thermal comfort is provided in all ACT public schools. This includes continuing upgrades to plant and equipment at public schools through dedicated funding, which includes delivering energy-efficient heating upgrades to ACT public schools. The Education Directorate will continue to progressively roll out heating and cooling solutions in line with the ACT Government climate change policies.

As part of the ACT Government COVID-19 response, a further \$5.2 million was allocated to improve ventilation in public schools.

### **Recommendation 30**

*The Committee recommends that the use of shipping containers on school grounds be minimised, and alternatives offered.*

Noted

The Education Directorate will continue to work with schools on a case-by-case basis to explore appropriate storage solutions.

The Government notes that in some instances, temporary infrastructure such as shipping containers provides flexible, fit for purpose storage facilities which meet the needs of some schools and their communities as well as provide value for money.

The Government is committed to ensuring schools continue to make decisions on short term, practical storage solutions that are in the best interests of their school community.

### **Recommendation 31**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government obtain expert advice in the design and location of bike and scooter storage facilities and consult with school communities based on that advice.*

Agreed

The ACT Government is committed to active travel as part of the Active Streets for Schools program.

The Education Directorate works with schools to determine appropriate locations and requirements for new bike and scooter storage facilities. School communities are involved through the representation of the school.

Final designs are subject to professional architectural/engineering input as required.

### **Recommendation 32**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government address traffic concerns by implementing traffic management plans and investing in infrastructure upgrades, including the installation of flashing school lights and other traffic calming measures*

Agreed in principle

The ACT Government's School Safety Program works closely with schools to identify and respond to traffic management concerns around schools. Traffic investigations and pedestrian studies are undertaken to identify the need for infrastructure improvements, which are delivered through existing programs like the Active Streets for Schools program. Traffic calming measures, including speed humps, crossings, line marking, reduced speed limits and increased school zone signage, are some of the treatments delivered through Active Streets. This includes consultation with relevant areas of government in planning for traffic and access travel requirements when planning for new and expanded schools.

Roads ACT has previously investigated the use of flashing lights around schools in the ACT. The study found the conditions that led to the introduction of flashing lights around schools in a number of other Australian states (for example, schools located on highways) are not present within the ACT road environment.

ACT schools are predominately on residential streets, with lower speeds and traffic volumes when compared with schools in other jurisdictions. School zones are also in place throughout the day (8am to 4pm), which reduces speeds and increases awareness around schools.

### **Recommendation 33**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government includes adequate consideration of car parking and traffic management measures in any school expansion plans.*

Agreed

As part of statutory planning requirements, planning and due diligence for new and expanded schools includes collaboration across government for analysis of traffic, pedestrian and active travel amenity including safety, car parking, vehicle access and traffic management considerations.

### **Recommendation 34**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that all development applications for developments adjacent to schools include traffic assessment and traffic management plans to minimise negative impacts on school users, nearby residents and the community and protect the safety of students.*

Agreed

As part of statutory planning requirements, planning and due diligence for proposed development, new or expanded schools includes analysis of traffic, pedestrian and active travel amenity including safety, car parking, vehicle access and traffic management considerations.

### **Recommendation 35**

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continues to support schools to communicate and engage with families on hazardous materials in schools.*

Agreed

The ACT Government has allocated an additional \$15 million in funding until 2024-25 to accelerate the removal of hazardous materials from ACT schools.

This program, supported by dedicated staff, will continue to prioritise communication and engagement with school communities. This will include the notification of all hazardous materials works through school websites.